

THE MORBIHAN FFI BATTALIONS

In the wake of the Allied breakout from the Normandy peninsula in July 1944, the members of the French resistance became more formally organized. The umbrella designation for the various groups was the “French Forces of the Interior” (FFI), a term that would sometimes be used in the names of FFI units formed between the liberation of France and the regularization of these groups within the framework of the French Army.

Among some of the most active FFI units were those formed in the Department of Morbihan, located in southern Brittany. The Morbihan FFI formed twelve battalions, whose troops were over time incorporated into the regular army. FFI from all over Brittany played a significant role in the operations that screened the German Atlantic fortress of Lorient, known as the “Lorient Pocket”.

The Lorient Pocket was one of several on the Atlantic coast, the sieges of which took months and which were not resolved until the final month of the war. There was no glory in these operations – they took place on a forgotten front and were fought with a bewildering mix of equipment and armament. Nevertheless, the deployment of these ill-equipped French troops was a useful economy-of-force measure that freed the powerful regular troops of the Allied forces to be employed on more important fronts.

The history of the FFI units is only poorly documented in the English language. This document, and others like it, will attempt to shed some light on these unknown formations of the French Army of 1944-45. For a fuller treatment of this topic, the reader may consult Volume VI of *Les Grandes Unités Françaises*, published by the French Army Historical Service in Paris in 1980. Those seeking this work are advised it is neither easy to locate nor inexpensive to obtain.

- W. B. Wilson, January 2014

1st Morbihan Battalion (February 1944 – 15 November 1944). AKA Battalion “Hervé”. Formed from *Organisation de résistance de l’armée* (ORA) members. Strength of over 1,000 men in mid-November 1944. Took part in the liberation of Vannes on 5 August 1944 and later held the right bank of the Vilaine River. Incorporated into the III/41st Infantry Regiment on 16 November 1944.

2nd Morbihan Battalion (10 June 1944 – 31 May 1945). AKA Battalion “Le Garrec”. Formed from ORA members. Strength of almost 700 men in mid-December 1944. Employed in blocking position that isolated the Quiberon peninsula from the Lorient Pocket. In June 1945, remaining members were assigned as prisoner-of-war guards in the Military Region XI.

3rd Morbihan Battalion (25 May 1944 – 30 November 1944). AKA Battalion “Robo”. Formed from ORA members. Strength of over 900 men in mid-November 1944. Liberated Tréguier and manned the line in Blavet-Etel subsector. Incorporated into elements of the 19th Infantry Division and the 10th Ranger Battalion on 1 December 1944.

4th Morbihan Battalion (?? 1944 – 15 December 1944). Formed from *Franco-tireurs et partisans* (FTP) members. Strength of almost 500 men on 7 November 1944. Liberated Locminé, Colpo, Naizin, Josselin, and Carnac. Later manned the line in the Blavet-Etel subsector. Incorporated into security battalion XIII/11, the 4th Ranger Battalion, and the 2nd and 11th Morbihan FFI Battalions in December 1944.

5th Morbihan Battalion (August 1944 – 20 November 1944). AKA Battalion “Jacques”. Formed from FTP members. Strength of 400 men on 20 November 1944. Manned the line between Gestel and le Blavet. Incorporated into the II/41st Infantry Regiment, the 4th Morbihan Battalion, and the security battalion XIII/11 in November – December 1944.

6th Morbihan Battalion (1 September 1943 – 30 November 1944). AKA “Groupement Charles”. Formed from FTP members. Strength of 290 men on 27 November 1944. Manned the line between Gestel and le Blavet. Incorporated into the 4th Ranger Battalion, the 2nd Morbihan Battalion, and the 2nd Finistère Battalion in December 1944.

7th Morbihan Battalion (10 June 1944 – 31 May 1945). Formed from ORA members. Strength of almost 1,300 men on 27 November 1944. Manned the line between Gestel and le Blavet. In June 1945, remaining members were assigned as prisoner-of-war guards and guards for military depots.

8th Morbihan Battalion (May/June 1944 – 15 November 1944). AKA Battalion “Caro”. Formed from ORA members. Strength of over 1,000 men in August 1944. Manned the line in the Vilaine subsector. Bulk of troops incorporated into the II/41st Infantry Regiment in late November 1944.

9th Morbihan Battalion (August 1944 – 30 November 1944). AKA Battalion “Le Gouvello”. Formed from *Armée Secrète* (AS) and FTP members. Strength of 490 men on 27 November 1944. Manned the line in the Laita-Hennebont subsector. Incorporated into the 19th Dragoon Regiment and the security battalion XIII/11 starting 16 November 1944.

10th Morbihan Battalion (Summer 1944 – 15 June 1945). AKA Battalion “Le Coutaller”. Formed from Libération-Nord members. Strength of 709 men in March 1945. Manned the line between

Blavet and Nostang. Designated 10th Ranger Battalion in December 1944. From 16 June 1945, incorporated into the 19th Infantry Division and Military Region XI.

11th Morbihan Battalion (1 November 1943 – 31 December 1944). AKA Battalion “Icare”. Formed from FTP members. Strength of 470 men on 27 November 1944. Liberated Auray and La Trinité-sur-Mer. Manned the line in the Blavet-Etel subsector. Incorporated into the III/41st Infantry Regiment and the 14th Ranger Battalion during 27 November – 31 December 1944.

12th Morbihan Battalion (June 1944 – 15 November 1944). AKA Battalion “La Morlais”. Formed from *Organisation Civile Militaire* (OCM) members. Strength of over 400 men in mid-November 1944. Secured the bridges at Redon and areas around the town. Incorporated into the II/41st Infantry Regiment on 16 November 1944.